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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0889
INFO RHMFSS/AFRICOM
RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE 0155
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0257
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0268
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0169
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0116
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 0444
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0428
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0424
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGUI 000085

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
LONDON FOR PLORD
AFRICOM FOR KOCH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CT](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S TRAVEL TO KAGA BANDORO RESTRICTED BY CARG

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On Thursday, March 26, 2009, Ambassador and visiting AFRICOM officer departed Bangui, bound for the town of Kaga Bandoro to visit the various Central African and international organizations working in the region. Kaga Bandoro sits on one of the fault lines of conflict in the CAR and is a major hub of NGO activity. Most recently, Kaga Bandoro has been the site of new conflict between mysterious Chadian 'horsemen' and the APRD. Thirty kilometers short of Kaga Bandoro, the Ambassador's party was stopped at an improvised Gendarme road block and ordered to turn back to the last town because 'unknown persons' were crossing the road and posed a potential threat to the Ambassador's party. In the course of the evening this was changed to an order to return to Bangui, under escort, because of 'insecurity' Ambassador and party returned to Bangui the next day. END SUMMARY

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BACKGROUND
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¶12. (SBU) Recently, Kaga Bandoro has been in the news because of new conflict between Fulani herders, their CAR/Chadian 'servants/slaves' and the APRD, one of the largest rebel movements in the CAR. According to the most reasonable sources - after the servants objected to their working conditions/pay, the Fulani killed several in punishment. The survivors then appealed to the APRD, the only effective law and order in the region, for support. The APRD, in turn, killed some of the Fulani, who, in their turn, appealed for help from Chadian Arabs. Upon the arrival of the Chadians, three villages were burned as they attempted to search for the APRD. (All of these details must be taken with great care, and most are probably wrong, but the bottom line is that the Chadian embassy confirmed that five of their citizens were killed and everyone agrees that three villages were burned.) The result is about 2,000 new IDP's split between the Baptist Mid Mission compound (a U.S. missionary group) and other locations around Kaga Bandoro.

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THE TRIP
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¶13. (SBU) Ambassador departed Bangui on March 26th accompanied by Major Christopher Koch, the CAR desk officer from AFRICOM. The goal, as mentioned to the Central African Government (CARG), including the Army Chief of Staff and the Vice Minister of Defense, was to visit MICOPAX/FACA, the NGO community, US missionary activities, and the CARG in Kaga Bandoro. Noting the

CARG's sensitivity to the Ambassador's travel to Ndele, the Ambassador made a point of mentioning this travel on every occasion. However, consistent with past practice, Post did not/not send a Diplomatic Note to either request or notify the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the trip. The DCM, MO, USAID, etc. have visited the area a number of times without incident and as Maj. Koch was here to review the possibilities of US engagement in security sector reform; this seemed a reasonable place to start understanding the realities of military operations on the ground in CAR.

¶4. (SBU) About thirty kilometers south of Kaga Bandoro, the Ambassador and party were stopped at an improvised Gendarme road block and told that it was too dangerous to continue - unknown armed men had been seen on the road. It did not take long to discover that:

-- None of the Gendarmes were in uniform (other than web gear and weapons) because they had arrived from Kaga Bandoro only minutes before.

-- No one in the village had seen or heard anything unusual in the area.

¶5. (SBU) The Gendarme commander identified himself as the commander of the Kaga Bandoro region and although the Ambassador offered to wait until the morning, he was told to backtrack some forty kilometers to Dekoa. The embassy party returned to Dekoa, found a place to camp, and planned retire for the night. That evening the Gendarme commander returned and showed a telegraphic order which directed him to, `stop [lit. `evince'] the mission of the US ambassador' and return him to Bangui under escort due

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to `insecurity' in the area. The Ambassador replied that that this was very serious matter and would have to be discussed further in the morning. The Gendarmes left.

¶6. (SBU) In the morning, after telephonic consultation with the DCM, the Ambassador decided to return to Bangui; not waiting for an `escort'. At Sibut he was again stopped and told that we must be escorted. He declined the escort; politely, but firmly. (The local commander recognized the Ambassador from a Trafficking in Persons seminar in Bangui and was willing to accept the situation, apologizing that he was following orders.) The party arrived in Bangui without further incident.

¶7. (SBU) In Bangui, the embassy reached out to the Vice Minister of Defense, Francis Bozize (The son of President Francois Bozize) to ask about the Major's upcoming trip to Bouar. We were referred to the Chief of Staff who said that it would be permitted as long as:

-- That the party included a FACA escort officer, and,

-- That the party made no stops en route. Specifically, a planned stop in Bossembele, site of a mysterious prison break in January 2009, was refused.

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FALL OUT
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¶8. (SBU) As this trip to Kaga Bandoro had been discussed with the Minister Delegue for Defense and the Chief of Staff during the DATT's visit the week before, it is reasonable to assume that the decision to stop the trip was taken at the last minute by President Bozize. Possibly as an expression of his displeasure at what he may see as the Embassy willfully ignoring his warning not to travel outside Bangui without requesting permission. (A warning delivered to the Ambassador personally and repeated through the Foreign Minister.)

-- It is clear that there was no insecurity in Kaga Bandoro, as the road remained open and indeed, the Prefet was calling us asking where we were. No other traffic was stopped. It is also possible that the CARG believed that the Ambassador was

returning to the Ndele region.

-- Embassy accepted the `restrictions' on the trip to Bouar as 1) Maj. Koch was already in country, 2) the escort officer was a former IMET officer whom Post wanted to meet.

As reported SEPTEL, the CARG has now sent out a circular Diplomatic Note which requires all Chiefs of Mission and their `collaborators' to inform the Foreign Ministry of all travel to zones which are `under tension' (lit. sous tension). No such zones have been identified as yet. END SUMMARY

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